

***Beowulf* Introductory Activity**

Activity 2: Background Information

Video Introduction: The epic poem *Beowulf* is one of the most widely read works in the English language. Though scholars do not know the precise origins and author of the *Beowulf* text, it was most likely composed in the 8th century AD. “Clash of the Gods: *Beowulf*” explores the significance of this classic epic, investigating how and why this tale of heroism has been so widely read for generations. As the *Beowulf* epic continues to capture the imagination of readers, historians and archaeologists have searched for physical evidence that might confirm whether or not a real-life *Beowulf* existed. Radio carbon testing, archaeological excavations and careful analysis have unearthed new information regarding the context in which the story was created and why these Norse myths have prevailed. Did a mead hall much like Heorot, the gathering place for warriors, actually exist? Did a hero much like *Beowulf* once lead the Geats? This program examines these new dimensions to the *Beowulf* epic, and provides an excellent visual companion to this landmark text.

Directions: As you watch “Clash of the Gods: *Beowulf*,” answer the following questions. Use a separate sheet of paper for your responses.

1. When and where do scholars believe the *Beowulf* text was written? What are some clues they have used to explain why they believe it was written during this time period?
2. In this program, the narrator discusses the decline of “paganism” and the rise of Christianity. What did this shift mean, and why was it significant?
3. Why do you think King Hrothgar called upon *Beowulf* to help him slay Grendel? Why do you think *Beowulf* was willing to accept this challenge?
4. During *Beowulf*’s era, what were some of the funeral procedures for warriors?
5. This documentary explores the discovery of artifacts at Sutton Hoo. How do these artifacts possibly shed light on the *Beowulf* epic? Do you think these findings are important?
6. Archaeologists have uncovered a structure that seems very similar to the hall known as Heorot in *Beowulf*. What was the importance of these halls? Do you think these artifacts shed light on ancient Anglo-Saxon society?
7. How did Grendel’s mother attempt to seek revenge for the loss of her son? What do you think is the importance of this section of the epic in comparison with the 1st section?
8. This program discusses the importance of dragons in mythology. What have dragons traditionally represented in literature?
9. How did the rise of Christianity influence the *Beowulf* epic, according to the scholars in this program?
10. Why do you think *Beowulf* is still considered a classic of English literature?

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1gra8c_clash-of-the-gods-s01e08-beowulf-hdtv-xvid-fqm_tech

